



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

# TONIC-SOL-FA; PRO AND CON

By J. A. FULLER-MAITLAND

IN two articles in the April, 1918, number of *The Musical Quarterly*, the Tonic-Sol-Fa system comes in for hearty praise, which in truth it well deserves. As I gather that the system is not in such universal use in the United States as it has been in England, I may perhaps be allowed to refer to some aspects of its working in the country of its origin. The time has gone by when one was obliged to take sides about it, and either to enlist as a whole-hearted partisan of T.S.F. eschewing all music that could not easily be written in it, or else to be classed among the "high-brow" musicians who knew nothing about it and cared less, condemning it as superficial and associated with the 'lower orders' and non-conformity in general. In the present day, one may recognize, without going thereby in peril of one's life, that it has defects as well as merits, and that it is eminently useful in certain ways, though in others it has the effect of keeping back musical progress.

It is obvious that its great asset, the constant reference to the tonic of the key, is nothing new; this was recognized under the Hexachordal system, just as clearly as the principle of the movable *Do*, though that was called by the original name of *Ut*. The truth of Just Intonation is contained in the T.S.F. modulator, though it is a curious fact that this is not intentionally or expressly taught. The fact that G sharp and A flat are not the same note, though the same key has to serve for both on the piano, is conveyed, or might be conveyed to the pupils of T.S.F., but by a very singular accident, the modulator which hangs on the wall of every elementary school in England, and the book which the teacher holds in his hand, were formerly at variance as to which note is the higher. This discrepancy remained unnoticed so long, that it is fair to conclude that the valuable information contained in the system was not turned to much account in practical teaching.

Consciously or unconsciously, the pupils of T.S.F. do sing better in tune than other children, and this of itself is no light matter. The ease with which a single part of a vocal composition can be read is of course a very great advantage. As long as the

attention need only be kept to the singer's own part, and as long as there is a competent conductor to superintend matters, there is no comparison as to which is the more successful notation, and the ear-training which goes on while the T.S.F. system is being practised, is not to be despised. Again, there is the fact that some kind of musical nourishment is given to a large class of the community who, if confined to the staff notation, would never take the trouble to learn music at all. Perhaps the most useful work of T.S.F. is as the best possible introduction to the staff notation. Just as the musicians of old time used the Gamut (i.e. the plan of the Guidonian hexachords), side by side with the more elaborate notation of the stave, so the wise music-teachers of the modern world would do well if they used the T.S.F. principally as a stepping-stone to higher things. For who, having any wide survey of the history of music, or of any period of its development, can doubt for a moment which of the two systems is the higher? The staff is in truth a language of universal application, and the attempt to set up the T.S.F. system as a rival to it is bound to meet with ultimate failure. Nevertheless, a great number of people in England are now under the impression that the two systems are rivals, and tell you, with a smirk of complacency, that they do not sing from "the old notation."

But before going on to the practical effect of T.S.F. teaching, I may be excused for summing up a few of the charges brought against it by those trained musicians who have been at the pains to understand it. The abolition of the ideas "up" and "down" in connection with sound, is claimed as an advantage by the ordinary teacher, who can see that there is nothing actually high about a "high" note, or low about a "low" one. We hope that this abolition will not proceed so far that the Shakespearean commentator of the future will be puzzled to know what can have been meant by the line "that can sing both high and low." When all arguments have been exhausted to prove that one end of the keyboard, for example, is not in a more elevated position than the other, the human instinct still persists, and in the effort of singing a "high" note there will always be some psychological correspondence with the notion of actual altitude. A less doubtful defect of the T.S.F. system is the difficulty of reading anything like a score so as to give the composite idea of a harmonic progression by the sight of four rows of letters; it may be attained, but the difficulty of attaining it leaves all the difficulties of reading the usual notation far behind. The representation of rests, and in general of the endurance of notes, as well as of silences, is so imperfect

in T.S.F. that its strongest advocate will hardly claim that it is perfect in this way. The absence of any indication as to the length of time during which the one part upon which the singer's attention has to be fixed, should keep silence, makes it exceedingly difficult to impart even to an intelligent choir any composition of a polyphonic character. With a very first-rate conductor who can be trusted to give each part its cue, the result may be satisfactory, but as a rule it is one of a choir-trainer's great difficulties that singers will not understand that the blank space on the paper they are reading represents an exact space of time.

In the early days of the movement, I have heard that there was some difference of opinion concerning the notation of the minor mode in modern music. Whether this were so or not, the fact remains that the tonic of the minor mode is called Lah, so that the Doh is not quite as movable as some people might wish it to be. For, of course, the base, final, or keynote of the minor mode is the note a minor third below the keynote of the major scale to which it stands in the relation of "relative minor." It is not merely an offshoot as it were of the major scale, to be constantly referred to the keynote of that scale instead of to its own keynote. The same erroneous decision, as I venture to think it, is even more glaringly seen in the attempt to force modal music into the T.S.F. notation. Each final should be called Doh, and the only really logical way of adapting the new notation to the old scales would be to use the "accidental" syllables much more freely. The following is a table of the modes in what would be their T.S.F. notation if this were logically carried out (it will be observed that no modification of the syllable Ray appears to exist which would indicate the second step of the Phrygian mode):

I	III	V	VII	IX	XIII
Dorian	Phrygian	Lydian	Mixolydian	Aeolian	Ionian
d	d	d	d	d	d
ta	ta	t	ta	ta	t
l	la	l	l	la	l
s	s	s	s	s	s
f	f	fe	f	f	f
ma	ma	m	m	ma	m
r	de	r	r	r	r
d	d	d	d	d	d

I wonder whether it is really the case that "the Roman Catholics like the notation because it fits in so well with the Gregorian system." (*Mus. Quarterly*, vol. iv, p. 194.) In one way no doubt it fits in well with the Gregorian system, in that its imperfect

notation of time is not felt as a drawback in singing Plainsong. But the expression of the modes in the T.S.F. system leaves a great deal to desire.

Another defect inherent in the system is in connection with its process of modulation. Sometimes half-way through a simple hymn-tune, the Sol-faist is required to change his keynote, and go through an elaborate mental calculation to the effect that the note he has approached as Soh is for the next few bars to be thought of as Doh. This is of course in regard to the simplest of all modulations, implying a half-close in the dominant; but whether complicated or not, the change of tonic does require a psychological change of attitude towards the old key and the new, which is beautifully left in a kind of uncertainty in the staff notation. The use of accidentals there is understood as indicating no new attitude towards another key; this, when required, is effected by a change of the whole key-signature. But every slightest modulation in T.S.F. requires a shifting of the mind to the new tonic, and, what is worse, a quite definite acceptance of the new key as established. Now in much of the music that has best stood the test of time, and in much that has been most universally accepted as the greatest, part of the charm it exercises over mankind is due to the gradual change in the hearer's attitude towards a new key, to the gradual discovery of the point to which the modulation is going to take him; his pleasure will be greatly lessened if he is obliged at every note to have a clear idea in his mind as to the whereabouts of the key he is stated to be in at the moment.

The weightiest objection which trained musicians have to T.S.F. is based on the quality of the music provided for its pupils. It is beyond question that some of the greatest choral compositions can be expressed in T.S.F. and for the popularization of such works as *Messiah* or *Elijah* by its means, we should, I suppose, be thankful, even though the vogue of these two masterpieces in England has prevented lovers of Handel and Mendelssohn from intimacy with the other oratorios of either composer. Perhaps some bold T.S.F. advocate has tried to put Bach's B minor mass into this notation, but, if so, I am sure that most people who have attempted to learn it by that notation will have flown to the safe simplicity of the staff. As the use of the T.S.F. system is virtually compulsory all over England, and as school inspectors are easily dazzled by feats of so-called "reading" which seem to them phenomenal, the financial success of the system has brought about the composition of an enormous quantity of music whose sole excuse is that it is well adapted for the notation for which

it is intended. Most of it has no other merit whatsoever, and it is a sad experience to go into a school in some part of England where all the children's voices are of beautiful quality and all or nearly all possess strong musical instinct, and to hear the kind of trash that is being forced into their throats and being called "good music." Nowhere is the commercialism of the musical world of England so rampant as in regard to the poisonous balderdash with which the taste of the children is being corrupted. I spoke above of "so-called reading"; it is only too evident that most teachers and inspectors of schools are quite satisfied when the children have read the notes together with the T.S.F. names for them, without regard to the words provided in their copies. Very few people seem to realize that the work of reading has only proceeded half-way when this is done; and here is another defect of the T.S.F. system, that the singer's mind is always hampered by the temptation to repeat, instead of the words put down for him, the actual syllables which he is accustomed to associate with the notes he sings.

As an independent musical system, even within its limited sphere of choral singing, the T.S.F. cannot take a very high place, though it is invaluable as a stepping-stone to the other notation. Apart from the intrinsic merits and defects of the system, we may consider some points of its practical working in England. Of course it has the very great merit of making choral societies a familiar feature of English country life, and so of providing the raw material for those competition festivals which are an ever-increasing influence in national music, and which will no doubt pursue their successful course now that the war is over. But the difficulty of expressing any of the more complicated kinds of music, and the kind of attitude generally adopted by Sol-faists towards real music, has caused the managers of many festivals to forbid any competing choir to use T.S.F. It is a merit, no doubt, that the cost of printing T.S.F. music is so low, but this is surely counterbalanced by the corresponding cheapness of the artistic quality usually attained in the compositions that are printed in it. While the system gives much encouragement to the cause of vocal or rather choral music, its unavoidable discouragement of instrumental music is a very serious drawback. For one cannot conceive of any advocate of T.S.F. being so enthusiastic as to attempt to play any instrument from his favourite notation. The experiment of printing instrumental compositions in T.S.F. may have been tried, but it has certainly made little way even with the public that is accustomed to use it for singing.